

Gravina Access Project

Presented by the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

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DOT&PF Announces its Recommended Alternative

On January 7, 2002, Joe Perkins, Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), announced Alternative F3 – the bridge alternative that crosses Pennock Island – as DOT&PF’s recommended alternative for the Gravina Access Project. The DOT&PF’s recommendation was based on its careful review of technical studies conducted for the Gravina Access Project during the past year. The DOT&PF made its recommendation publicly known to encourage a dialogue within the community and get the community’s input on a recommended alternative.

The recommended alternative was selected over seven other alternatives and the no action alternative. Commissioner Perkins said the Pennock Island crossing was chosen because it best meets the community’s need for improved access to Gravina Island, allows the passage of major cruise ships, has less impact on floatplane traffic and the Ketchikan International Airport, will be less visibly intrusive, and uses bridge structures that are not as technically challenging as other alternatives. Building the crossing at Pennock Island is estimated to cost \$190 million.

Ketchikan Community Encouraged to Review the Alternatives and Make its Recommendation

Now that the DOT&PF has made its recommendation for the Gravina Access Project, it is time for the community to weigh in and provide input. Over the next couple of months, the DOT&PF is welcoming input from members of the community on the evaluation of all of the alternatives currently under consideration and DOT&PF’s recommendation for the Pennock Island crossing, Alternative F3. A Public Open House will be held on Monday, February 11 at the Ted Ferry Civic Center from 3pm to 8pm. This meeting is intended as an opportunity for the public to meet with the Gravina Access Project Team and ask questions regarding the alternatives analysis, as well as the factors that went into DOT&PF’s recommendation.



Technical Reports Available for Public Review

Over the past year, the Gravina Access Project Team has conducted numerous engineering and environmental studies to refine project design information and evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the project alternatives. These studies include detailed evaluations of economic impacts, impacts to navigation in Tongass Narrows, impacts to floatplane operations, costs associated with construction and long-term use of each alternative, and impacts to wildlife habitat and other natural resources. The findings of these studies are summarized in a report entitled “Alternatives Evaluation – Summary Report.” The summary report and the supporting technical reports are now available for public and agency viewing at the following locations – the Ketchikan Public Library, Gravina Access Project office (Millard + Peters Architects, LLC 300 Mill Street, Suite 26) in Ketchikan, and the project website: www.gravina-access.com. The public is invited to review these studies and become informed on the project alternatives and their potential effects.

The findings of the technical studies will be used as the basis for developing the environmental impact statement for the project. By making the technical reports available to the public, the project team hopes to (1) facilitate the community’s discussion of the recommended alternative and (2) get feedback from the community on the information provided.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Process of Identifying Reasonable Alternatives

In the past three decades, studies have analyzed possible crossings between Revillagigedo and Gravina and evaluated several types of bridge and tunnel structures for crossing. But much of this information was outdated or incomplete. In 1998, the Federal Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) allocated funds specifically for the Gravina Access Project. Because this project is funded by federal dollars, the project must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires the study of all reasonable alternatives, including the no-action alternative, and disclosure of environmental impacts associated with each alternative to the public and decision makers.

In spring 2000, the project team developed 18 alternative concepts for crossing Tongass Narrows. These included multiple types of bridges (higher, lower, moveable, and combinations), underwater tunnels, and ferry connections that would augment the existing airport ferry service. A screening process examined each alternative in terms of: (1) its consistency with the purpose and need for the project; (2) its potential environmental effects; (3) its potential transportation-related effects; and (4) its estimated costs. As part of the evaluation of the 18 original alternatives, DOT&PF received valuable input from agencies and the Ketchikan community. 11 of the 18 alternative concepts were eliminated from the pool of reasonable alternatives based largely on 50-year life-cycle costs deemed too high to be reasonable.

The state and federal agencies involved in the environmental review process approved the seven remaining alternatives, including a no-action alternative, for further review and analysis. Spring 2001 engineering studies led to refinements of the alternatives and the addition of a variation on bridge Alternative C3. This resulted in a total of eight build alternatives for further consideration. The full list of alternatives appears below, and the alignments are shown on this and the facing page.

- **C3(a):** A bridge, north of quarry to airport 200 feet high.
- **C3(b):** A bridge, north of quarry to airport, 120 feet high.
- **C4:** A bridge, from quarry to airport 200 feet high.
- **D1:** A bridge, mid-quarry to airport, 120 feet high.
- **F3:** A bridge 60 feet high from Revilla Island to Pennock Island and a bridge from Pennock Island to Gravina Island 200 feet high.
- **G2:** Northern ferry, Peninsula Point to Lewis Point.
- **G3:** Southern ferry, downtown/harbor to Gravina.
- **G4:** Middle ferry, with terminals adjacent to existing ferry terminals.
- No-action alternative.



Highs and Lows

Engineers have been considering bridges capable of passing cruise ships, and bridges capable of passing state ferries. The higher bridge openings would be 200-feet above high tide, the same height as obstructions cruise ships must pass under between Vancouver and Ketchikan. The lower options would be 120-feet above high tide, requiring cruise ships to go around Gravina Island.

EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

Engineering and Environmental Studies Conducted in 2001

During 2001, the Gravina Access Project team evaluated the eight project alternatives and the no-action alternative in a series of engineering and environmental technical reports. These reports and the "Alternatives Evaluation – Summary Report" can be found at the Ketchikan Public Library, the Gravina Access Project office, and the project website. Topics covered include:

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| ■ Preliminary Bridge and Ferry Design | ■ Land Use |
| ■ Economy and Economic Development | ■ Social Environment |
| ■ Traffic and Transportation | ■ Visual Environment |
| ■ Hazardous Waste Sites | ■ Energy and Utilities |
| ■ Biological Resources | ■ Historic & Archaeological Preservation |
| ■ Water Quality | ■ Navigation and Aviation |

DOT&PF's Recommendation Based on Technical Studies

Based on the assessment of key elements, such as navigation, aviation, costs, economics, and environmental issues, DOT&PF recommends Alternative F3 – the alternative that traverses Tongass Narrows via Pennock Island. The DOT&PF identified the Pennock alternative as its recommended alternative principally for the following reasons:

- Meets the project's purpose and need.
- Meets the community's goal of bridge access to Gravina Island.
- Allows the passage of major cruise ships, thereby maintaining Ketchikan's tourism industry.
- Better serves Ketchikan's long-term needs for convenient and reliable transportation to the airport and developable land than the ferry alternatives.
- Less potential impact to Ketchikan's floatplane industry than bridge alternatives located at the airport.
- Minimal impact to airport facilities as compared to the bridge alternatives located at the airport.
- No intrusions into Ketchikan International Airport's airspace.
- Pennock bridge structures are not as technically challenging as the other bridge alternatives.
- Pennock bridge structures would be less visibly intrusive than the other bridge alternatives.

Although DOT&PF views the Pennock alternative as its recommended alternative, it recognizes the challenges associated with this crossing:

- The crossing point is not central to Ketchikan's population center.
- Traffic will be routed through the Downtown core.
- Cruise ships and other large vessels will be directed through the West Channel.

- Cruise ship maneuvers through West channel to the city docks are more inconvenient and riskier than current East Channel maneuvers.
- Some cruise lines have expressed reservations about calling in Ketchikan through the West Channel.
- There is potential of an annual reduction in cruise-related spending because of reduced cruise ship calls.
- Mitigating this economic impact may involve basing cruise ship dockings in a new location or locations. To be successful, community coordination with cruise line agencies would be essential for maintaining and, if desired, growing Ketchikan's important tourist industry.

WHAT'S NEXT

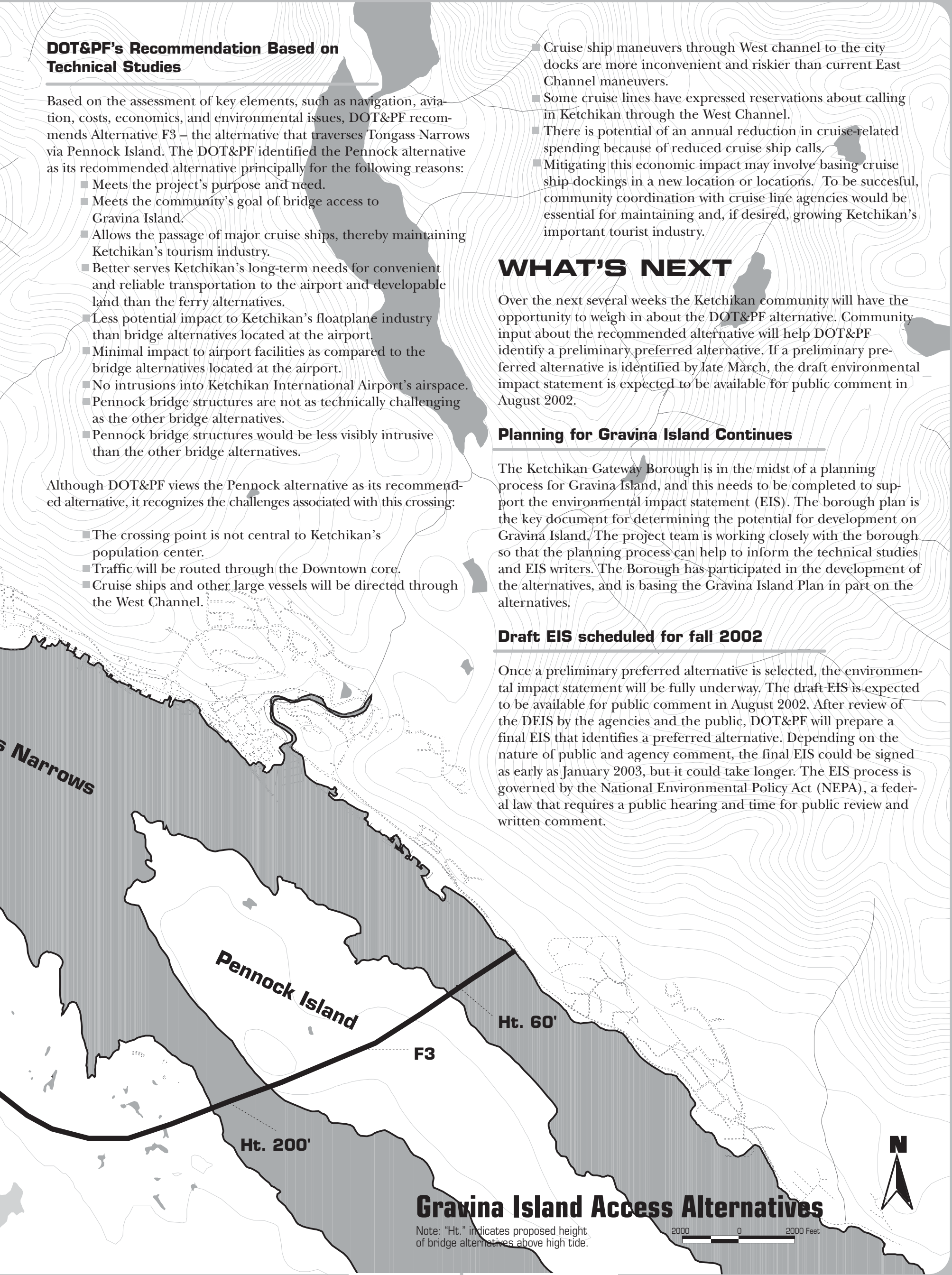
Over the next several weeks the Ketchikan community will have the opportunity to weigh in about the DOT&PF alternative. Community input about the recommended alternative will help DOT&PF identify a preliminary preferred alternative. If a preliminary preferred alternative is identified by late March, the draft environmental impact statement is expected to be available for public comment in August 2002.

Planning for Gravina Island Continues

The Ketchikan Gateway Borough is in the midst of a planning process for Gravina Island, and this needs to be completed to support the environmental impact statement (EIS). The borough plan is the key document for determining the potential for development on Gravina Island. The project team is working closely with the borough so that the planning process can help to inform the technical studies and EIS writers. The Borough has participated in the development of the alternatives, and is basing the Gravina Island Plan in part on the alternatives.

Draft EIS scheduled for fall 2002

Once a preliminary preferred alternative is selected, the environmental impact statement will be fully underway. The draft EIS is expected to be available for public comment in August 2002. After review of the DEIS by the agencies and the public, DOT&PF will prepare a final EIS that identifies a preferred alternative. Depending on the nature of public and agency comment, the final EIS could be signed as early as January 2003, but it could take longer. The EIS process is governed by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a federal law that requires a public hearing and time for public review and written comment.



Gravina Island Access Alternatives

Note: "Ht." indicates proposed height of bridge alternatives above high tide.

Project Schedule

2002

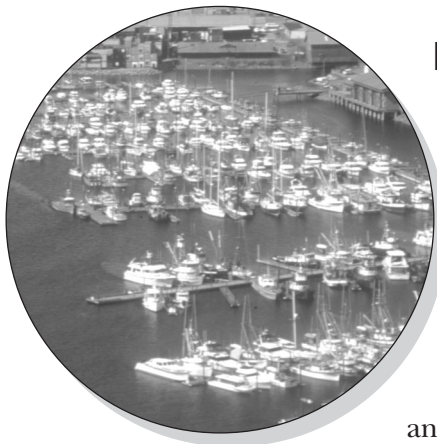
January 7-March 15Community discussion of alternatives evaluation
March 16-August 15Preparation of Draft EIS
August 16-September 30Public comment on Draft EIS
October 1-December 15Preparation of Final EIS
December 16-January 31, 2003Public comment on Final EIS

2003 - 2004

February 1, 2003Record of Decision
February 2003-July 2004Design

2004 - 2006

July 2004-December 2006Construction



DOT&PF to Host Public Open House February 11

To facilitate community discussion of a recommended alternative, the DOT&PF is hosting a Public Open House at the Ted Ferry Civic Center on February 11, 2002, from 3pm-8pm. This is an opportunity for community members to come learn about the recent

studies of the project alternatives and DOT&PF's announcement regarding its decision to recommend the alternative that crosses Pennock Island.

Members of the project team will be available to answer your questions and provide you with the information that went into DOT&PF's recommendation.

The public is encouraged to come learn more about all of the alternatives and the alternative evaluation process. The open house is intended for the public to provide feedback and to give input on the recommended alternative.

Technical reports will also be available for your review. These reports will form the basis of the environmental impact assessment, which will be conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These reports are also available at the Ketchikan Public Library, the Gravina Access Project office, and the project website, www.gravina-access.com.

We Want Your Input

Continuous public input is a key element with the Gravina Access Project. There continues to be numerous opportunities to comment on the project alternatives and the evaluation of project impacts. From now through March 15, the project team is accepting comments on DOT&PF's recommended Pennock Island alternative and the evaluation of alternatives that led to that recommendation. This is also an opportunity for the Ketchikan community to weigh in with its recommended alternative. Additional public meetings are being scheduled for late February or early March. At these meetings, additional questions may be asked of the project team, and public comments will be taken.

All of the reasonable alternatives identified during DOT&PF's planning process will be carried forward and analyzed further in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The public and public agencies will have an opportunity to comment on and provide input to the findings presented in the Draft EIS, scheduled for release in fall 2002.

How to Submit Your Comments

You can submit written comments to any of the contacts listed below at any time in the environmental review process. Written comments can be sent via e-mail or traditional mail services. The website also provides a comment submittal form. You are also welcome to submit your comments to project team members at the Public Open House this month.

We value your input and look forward to hearing from you.

Contacts

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